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SCOUTS OF EMPIRE



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THE STORY OF THE DISCOVERY OF
THE GREAT NORTH-WEST

BY

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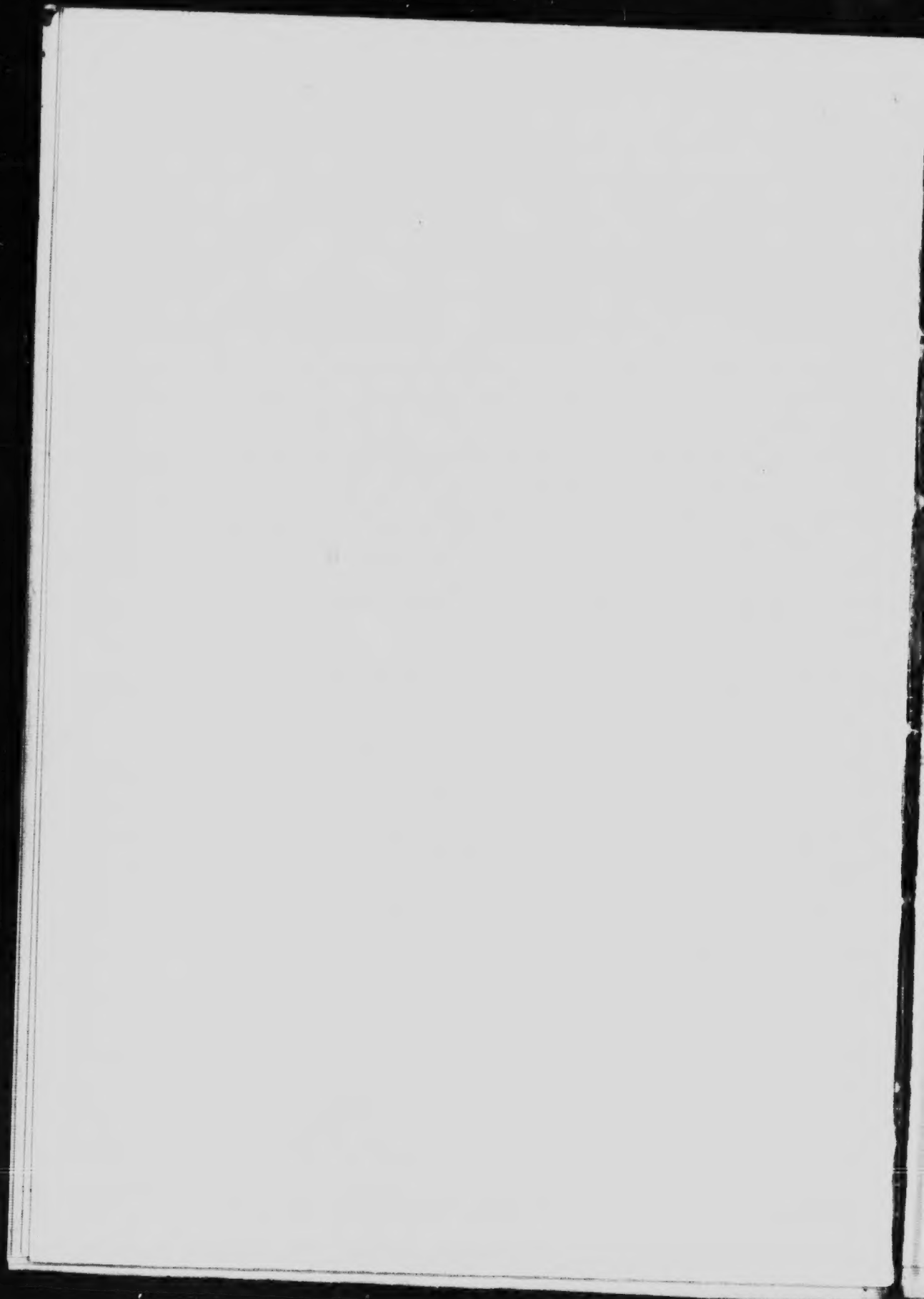
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I

HENRY HUDSON AND THE GREAT BAY

IN the whole history of Northern discovery no name stands out in more heroic proportions than that of Henry Hudson, navigator of unknown seas, pathfinder of a new empire. The very mystery that enshrouds his early life lends an added interest to the three years, packed with achievement, of which we have undoubted knowledge. What could be more typical of the simple manliness of the age than the passage in which that quaint old editor of English voyages, Samuel Purchas, describes the opening scene in Hudson's first voyage: "Anno 1607, Aprill the nineteenth, at Saint

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Ethelburge, in Bishops Gate street, did communicate with the rest of the parishioners these persons, seamen, purposing to goe to sea foure dayes after, for to discover a passage by the North Pole to Japan and China " ?

In this voyage, Hudson reached Greenland and Spitzbergen. The following year he again sailed in search of a north-east passage, and explored a part of Nova Zembla. Hudson's log of this second voyage contains a delightful picture of that elusive denizen of the deep, the mermaid : " This morning, one of our companie looking over boord saw a mermaid, and calling up some of the companie to see her, one more came up, and by that time shee was come close to the ship's side, looking earnestly on the men : a little after, a sea came and overturned her : from the navill upward, her backe and breasts were like a woman's, as they say that saw her ; her body as big as one of us ; her skin very white ; and long hair hanging downe behinde, of colour blacke : in her going

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downe they saw her taylor, which was like the taylor of a porpoise, and speckled like a mackerel."

Hudson's third voyage has now been made familiar to everyone, through the tercentenary celebrations last year on the noble river that bears his name. The circumstances of his fourth, and last, voyage, are not, however, quite so familiar; and the object of this article is to tell, briefly and simply, and as far as may be in the language of the original narratives, the story of Henry Hudson's last attempt to find the long-sought passage to the Indies, and its tragic conclusion.

He sailed from the Thames, April 17, 1610, in the *Discovery*, the same stout little craft that Captain Weymouth had sailed up the strait eight years before, and which was to bear Sir Thomas Button in his unavailing search for Hudson in 1612. The voyage was uneventful until they reached the entrance to Hudson Strait, where they encountered the curious phenomena which Captain Davis

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had described many years before, "the sea falling down into the gulfe with a mighty overfall and roaring." With infinite patience Hudson navigated his ship through the strait, buffeted by contrary winds, and threatened at every turn by masses of broken ice, while his mutinous crew were only prevented from seizing the vessel and turning her homewards by wholesome fear of their iron-hearted commander.

At the western end of the strait, Hudson sent a boat ashore in charge of Abacuk Prickett (whose garrulous journal of the voyage is our principal authority), to examine the land to the westward. Prickett climbed the hills, and looked out upon the waters of the great inland sea. One can imagine what the emotions of such a moment should have been; but they made no impression on the soul of Abacuk Prickett. That he stood upon the threshold of a momentous discovery; that for aught he knew to the contrary, this might indeed be the Western Sea, sought by

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generations of stout-hearted captains; that beyond the western horizon might lie the shores of sunny Cathay and the Isles of Spices; this, or anything like it, troubled not the heart of Abacuk Prickett. Doubtless, on his return to the ship, he reported to Hudson what he had seen from the mountain top; but what he had seen on the way thither was of much more immediate interest. "In this place," he says, "great store of fowle breed, and there is the best grasse that I had seene since we came from England. We saw some round hills of stone, like to grasse cockes, which at the first I tooke to be the worke of some Christian; and being nigh them I turned off the uppermost stone, and found them hollow within and full of fowles hanged by their neckes. . . . Wee came aboard and told the master what wee had seene, and perswaded him to stay a day or two in this place, telling him what refreshing might there bee had; but by no meanes would he stay." "So we left

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the fowle," laments poor Prickett ; while his captain, regardless of these wasted delicacies, drove his ship out into that vast sea which held such wonderful possibilities.

For reasons of his own, to which we have no clue, Hudson did not cross the bay, but sailed down the eastern shore, until he finally brought the *Discovery* to anchor at the foot of James Bay. "Here," says Prickett, "our master sent out our boat, with myselfe and the carpenter to seeke a place to winter in ; and it was time, for the nights were long and cold, and the earth covered with snow. . . . We went to the south and the south-west, and found a place, whereunto we brought our ship, and haled her aground : and this was the first of November. By the tenth thereof we were frozen in."

The exact place where Hudson spent this memorable winter is a matter of some interest. Unfortunately Prickett's narrative, with its vague and confusing geography,

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helps us not at all, but other evidence points to the mouth of the Rupert. In a memorial of the Hudson's Bay Company, of 1699, it is said that Captain Gillam "built Fort St. Charles upon the ruins of a House which had been built there above sixty Yeares before by the English." Gillam had been sent out with the Canadian adventurer Radisson, in 1688, to build a fort and open up trade with the Indians; and on the strength of this voyage Prince Rupert and his associates obtained from King Charles the famous charter of the Hudson's Bay Company, Radisson himself, in his overland journey of 1662 to the shores of the bay, found "an old howse all demolished and battered with bouletts." That Hudson built a house on the shores of the bay, we know from Prickett's narrative; and that it was the same seen by Radisson in 1662, and by Gillam in 1668, does not admit of much doubt. Here is Prickett's characteristic story of the building of the house:—

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"Now out of season and time the master calleth the carpenter to goe in hand with an house on shoare, which at the beginning our master would not heare, when it might have been done. The carpenter told him, that the snow and frost were such, as hee neither could nor would goe in hand with such worke. Which when our master heard, hee ferreted him out of his cabbin to strike him, calling him by many foule names, and threatning to hang him. The carpenter told him that he knew what belonged to his place better than himselfe, and that hee was no house carpenter. So this passed, and the house was (after) made with much labour but to no end."

Now it appears that Hudson had brought with him a young man named Henry Greene, who, because he possessed some education, was given more consideration than others of the ship's company. But Greene was not the kind of man who accepts good fortune in an humble spirit, and presently made

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himself thoroughly obnoxious to Hudson, who from having shown him too much favour now ran to the other extreme. "You shall see," writes our faithful historian Prickett, "how the devil out of this so wrought with Green, that hee did the master what mischiefe hee could in seeking to discredit him, and to thrust him and many other honest men out of the ship in the end."

Hudson and his men passed a very uncomfortable winter on the bay, as might be expected. "To speake of all our trouble in this time of winter (which was so cold as it lamed the most of our company, and my selfe doe yet feele it) would bee too tedious," sa Prickett,—who thereupon proceeds to give a minute account of the winter's troubles. Having brought with him provisions for only a limited period, Hudson had to husband his resources with the utmost care, and this became in the end one of the causes, if not the main cause, of the final tragedy. For three months they were well supplied with

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ptarmigan, which winter in immense numbers around James Bay. With the spring, however, the ptarmigan left them, and as Hudson sternly refused to break into the scanty store of provisions needed for the homeward voyage, they were driven to every expedient to satisfy their hunger. "Wee went into the woods, hilles, and valleyes, for all things that had any shew of substance in them, how vile soever; the mosse of the ground, then the which I take the powder of a post to bee much better, and the frogge (in his ingendring time as loathsome as a toade) was not spared."

There follows, in Prickett's narrative, an account of the first meeting of Hudson and his men with the natives; an account interesting both because of its graphic simplicity, and also because it records the first fur-trading transaction in the afterwards famous territories of the Hudson's Bay Company: "About this time, when the ice

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began to breake out of the bayes, there came a savage to our ship, as it were to see and to bee seene, being the first that we had seene in all this time : whom our master intreated well, and made much of him, promising unto himselfe great matters by his meanes, and therefore would have all the knives and hatchets (which any man had) to his private use, but received none but from John King the carpenter, and my selfe. To this savage our master gave a knife, a looking-glasse, and buttons, who received them thankfully, and made signes that after hee had slept hee would come againe, which hee did. When hee came hee brought with him a sled, which hee drew after him, and upon it two deeres skinnes and two beaver skinnes. Hee had a scrip under his arme, out of which hee drew those things which the master had given him. Hee tooke the knife and laid it upon one of the beaver skinnes, and his glasses and buttons upon the other, and so gave them to the master, who received them ; and the

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savage tooke those things which the master had given him, and put them up into his scrip againe. Then the master shewed him an hatchet, for which hee would have given the master one of his deere skinnes, but our master would have them both, and so hee had, although not willingly. After many signes of people to the north and to the south, and that after so many sleepes he would come againe, he went his way, but never came more."

As the spring advanced and the ice went out of the small bays, the men got out the nets, with fair luck, while Hudson sailed down the coast in search of the Indians, from whom he hoped to secure a supply of meat, but returned disappointed.

It was now the middle of June, the bay was fairly clear of ice, and Hudson decided to sail for home, ill-equipped though he was with provisions of any description. To silence the grumbling of his men, he divided among the company all that remained of the

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ship's stores, making a pound apiece, for fourteen days, for each man's share. This, with a little cheese and about four score small fish, was all that remained for the long voyage home, unless they might chance to secure game in the Straits.

Three days they sailed to the north, but on the twenty-first of the month found themselves hemmed in by masses of floating ice. For long enough mutiny had been in the air, but fear of their captain, or some last traces of manliness, held the crew in check. Now all restraining influences were broken. The ice proved only a temporary barrier, but it was sufficient to seal the fate of Henry Hudson. Half the crew lay sick in their bunks, and all were on short rations. There was actually not sufficient food in the ship to keep them all alive during the homeward voyage. One expedient remained, and that they seized upon. They would turn the master and the sick adrift in the shallop, and let them shift for themselves.

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Of what followed we have only Prickett's narrative, but although he was more or less involved in the conspiracy, we may probably accept his story as substantially correct. Greene and the boatswain came to him on the night of the twenty-first, and told him of their plan. Prickett, if we may credit him, tried to dissuade them. He reminded them of their wives and children, and asked them why they should wilfully banish themselves from their native country, by committing so foul a deed. But Greene bade him hold his peace. He knew the worst, said he, which was to be hanged when he came home, and of the two he would rather be hanged at home than starved abroad. And that was patriotic of Henry Greene. So the pious Prickett, failing to turn them from their purpose, made them swear upon his Bible (which he is careful to tell us lay before him) that they would do no man harm; which they did cheerfully.

At daybreak, the conspirators gathered

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upon the deck, and seized Hudson as he came out of his cabin. "Then was the shallop hailed up to the ship side, and the poore, sicke, and lame men were called upon to get them out of their cabbins into the shallop." Prickett again assures us that he sought even at this eleventh hour to turn the mutineers from their purpose. "On my knees I besought them, for the love of God, to remember themselves, and to doe as they would be done unto. They bade me keepe myselfe well, and get me into my cabbin."

There had been some dispute as to the fate of Philip Staffe, the ship's carpenter. Greene, who had a grudge against him, would have turned him adrift, but the others overruled him, for the carpenter was needed on the ship. So it was decided to keep him on board; but they had reckoned without their man. This Staffe was a man, every inch of him. His character shines clear, though we get but one fleeting glimpse. He had been seized and bound, but was now

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set at liberty. Turning upon the mutineers, he consigned them all to the gallows, and climbed into the shallop with Hudson.

So they stood out of the ice, "the shallop being fast to the sterne of the shippe, and they cut her head fast from the sterne of our ship, then out with their top-sayles, and towards the east they stood in a cleere sea." Having done this, the men proceeded to ransack the master's cabin. While they were engaged in this congenial task, word came that the shallop was overtaking the ship. They rushed on deck, "let fall the mainsayle, and out with their top-sayles, and fly as from an enemy." The shallop dropped rapidly astern, and with her disappears that gallant seaman and dauntless explorer, Henry Hudson.

To record the homeward voyage of the mutineers would be in the nature of an anticlimax, but it may be worth mentioning that the estimable Henry Greene, with three of his companions, was treacherously, and

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most appropriately, murdered by the Eskimo on Digges Island ; and that the rest, after suffering incredible hardships, finally reached Plymouth. A contemporary narrative says that they were promptly thrown into prison, and that " they are going to be kept prisoners till their captain will have been found," and so they too drop out of sight.

II

THE QUEST OF THE COPPER-MINE

SAMUEL HEARNE, the intrepid explorer of the Barren Grounds of Northern Canada, was born in London in 1745. He entered the Navy as a midshipman in 1756, and saw service under Lord Hood, but finding little, if any, prospect of advancement, left the Navy and joined the Hudson's Bay Company. He acted as mate of one of their sloops employed in trading with the Eskimos on Hudson Bay, but the spirit of adventure impelled him to seek some more hazardous enterprise, by which he might hope to achieve distinction. Fortunately the Company were already casting about for a suitable man to lead an expedition inland,

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to solve the moot question of the Northwest Passage, and incidentally to search for copper mines, the existence of which had been reported by the Chipewyan Indians at Fort Prince of Wales. Governor Norton offered him the appointment, and he eagerly accepted.

On November 6, 1769, Hearne left the fort with a strong party of Indians, under their leader Chawchinahaw, and two English volunteers. He took with him instruments, maps, and ammunition and supplies sufficient for two years. As the guns of the fort roared a salute, the explorer must have felt confident of success. His mettle was to be severely tried, however, before that should come. Chawchinahaw, for reasons best known to himself, set himself to thwart Hearne in every possible way, and finally deserted him, setting off with his native followers in another direction. Lacking guides, nothing remained for Hearne but to turn about and make the best of his

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way back to the fort, a distance of some two hundred miles.

Undaunted by this mortifying failure, the explorer started again on February 23, 1770, taking with him a smaller party of Indians, and leaving the Englishmen behind. A salute was dispensed with, but the Governor and his officers lined the walls and gave Hearne three rousing cheers. He set off to the westward, and wintered on a lake on the upper waters of Seal River. In the spring he turned north, and on the last day of June reached the Kazan River, at a place which he called Cathawachaga, about a day's journey south of Yath-Kyed Lake. Again he was hampered by the perversity of the Indians, who wasted valuable time in hunting caribou and musk ox, until the year was too far advanced to admit of their reaching the Coppermine River—the goal of Hearne's ambition—that year. Hearne unfortunately lacked the quality of command which gave Mackenzie such supreme control

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over his equally refractory crew. The former possessed the will-power and determination to carry a project through at any cost to himself, but had little, if any, influence over his followers. To add to his difficulties, he broke his quadrant at the northern end of Dubawnt Lake; and for the second time must return to Prince of Wales, where he arrived November 25, after an absence of eight months and twenty-two days.

On the return journey, however, he was fortunate enough to meet a famous Chipewyan chief, Matonabee, who knew the country thoroughly and was absolutely trustworthy. Matonabee asked Hearne if he would make another attempt to reach the Coppermine, and on the explorer's emphatic statement that he was determined to carry out the discovery, even at the risk of his life, the Indian volunteered to accompany him.

This shrewd native philosopher had his own well-defined ideas as to the personnel

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of a successful exploring party. If he was to be believed, the real cause of the failure of the two attempts already made was the absence of women. Women were indispensable. Obviously they were made for labour; they could carry or haul as much as two men; they could pitch the tents; make and mend clothing; in fact, said Matonabee, there was no such thing as travelling in the north without their assistance. Moreover, he shrewdly added, "though they do everything, they are maintained at a trifling expense; for as they always stand cook, the very licking of their fingers in scarce times is sufficient for their subsistence." It was decided, therefore, that the party should consist of Matonabee, some of his immediate followers, and their wives.

Hearne set forth, for the third time, from Fort Prince of Wales, on December 7, 1770. By the end of the year they had reached Nuetlin Lake, and on March 2 camped on

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the shores of Wholdiah Lake. Matonabbee acted as guide, and his plan of campaign was worthy of the man. They were working leisurely to the westward, living on the country as they went. To turn north before spring would be to court certain starvation, but later, when the vast herds of caribou migrated north, it would be possible to make a dash for the Coppermine, with the assurance of an ample supply of provisions.

May, 1771, found the party at Clowey Lake, where they were joined by about two hundred natives, much to Hearne's annoyance. For a time he was puzzled to account for this formidable addition to his party, but on questioning them he learned that they were a war party, marching against their hereditary enemies, the Eskimo. He did what he could to dissuade them from their purpose, but they laughed at his scruples; nor was he able to prevent them from joining his own people.

They rested at Clowey Lake for a month,

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completing their preparations for the dash through the Barren Grounds. Then they set forth, almost due north, for the Coppermine. By the end of May they had reached another lake, called by the Indians Peshew. Here most of the women were left behind, with all the heavier equipment. At the Conge-cap-tha-wha-chaga River they met a number of Copper Indians, who helped them over the river, and agreed to act as guides for the last stage of the journey.

Their way lay for some miles over a trail so steep that they were often compelled to crawl on hands and knees. This was one of the main Indian thoroughfares, over the Stony Mountains. At the summit Hearne noticed several large flat stones covered with innumerable small pebbles, which the Copper Indians informed him had been deposited there as a tribute to the gods. The explorer added his pebble to the pile. July 13 they arrived at the banks of the Coppermine, which Hearne was disappointed

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to find quite a small and shallow stream. It had been represented to him as a mighty river, navigable for large vessels for many miles from its mouth, and on the strength of this description, he had built ambitious hopes of trade when he should have discovered the far-famed copper mines. Ships were to sail around from the bay—by what route does not appear—and ascend the river to the mines, where the valuable ore, reported to be there in inexhaustible quantities, could be readily loaded on board. On his return journey, Hearne searched diligently for the mines, but the entire party found but one small lump, which he carried back with him to Fort Prince of Wales as a souvenir of his journey. The fact remains that the Indians constantly brought copper to the fort, and always said that it came from this far-away-metal river. Perhaps some more fortunate prospector, better equipped with technical knowledge, may yet discover the much-talked-of mines, and the remote banks of

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the Coppermine may some day rival the southern shores of Lake Superior. Another generation may see a shipping port built at the mouth of the Coppermine, with a fleet of ore steamers plying thence to smelters say on the shores of Lake Athabaska—but this is wandering from the story of Samuel Hearne and his journey.

Arrived at the banks of the river, the Indians lost no time in sending scouts down stream to look for the Eskimo. The scouts presently returned and reported a considerable encampment some miles below. The Chipewyans immediately crossed the river, stripped, put on war paint, and armed themselves with spears and shields. It was decided to surprise the Eskimo in the early morning, before they had left their tents.

Everything favoured the Indians. They were in the midst of the village before the unfortunate Eskimo were aware of their presence. Hearne graphically describes the scene that followed: "The poor unhappy

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victims were surprised in the midst of their sleep, and had neither time nor power to make any resistance; men, women and children, in all upwards of twenty, ran out of their tents, stark naked, and endeavoured to make their escape; but the Indians having possession of all the land side, to no place could they fly for shelter. One alternative only remained, that of jumping into the river; but, as none of them attempted it, they all fell a victim to Indian barbarity."

To his horror, Hearne saw a young Eskimo girl speared at his very feet, so close that when the spear was thrust into her side she fell down, writhing round his legs. He pleaded earnestly with the Indians for her life, but without avail. As they transfixed her body to the ground with their spears, they asked him contemptuously if he wanted an Eskimo wife. To a Chipewyan, that was the last degree of degradation. Hearne could hardly restrain his tears at the horror of the scene and his own utter inability to prevent it.

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One of the most pitiful scenes of the massacre was the finding of an old woman, blind and deaf, sitting placidly on the banks of the Coppermine, fishing, while her friends and relatives were being butchered a few yards away. The Indians fell upon her before she had any conception of who or what they were. In her case, at least, murder was perhaps the best thing that could have happened. This wanton massacre had such an effect on the Eskimo, that when Hanbury visited the Coppermine one hundred and twenty-eight years afterward, he found that the story had been handed down from father to son, substantially as Hearne tells it in his narrative. It may or may not be regarded as retributive justice that to-day the broad country between the Coppermine and Hudson Bay, once occupied by the Chipewyans as their hunting-ground, knows them no more, and their places have been taken by the despised Eskimo.

From the site of the massacre—ever since

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known as Bloody Fall—Hearne could distinctly see the sea. He had already made a rough survey of the river from the point where he first struck it, about forty miles from its mouth, and he now completed the task. He made a rough calculation as to the latitude and longitude of the mouth of the river—a calculation which Sir John Franklin, who visited the place in 1821, found to be very rough indeed—took formal possession of the country on behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company; and then lost no time in beginning the long homeward journey. He took a somewhat more westerly course, which brought him, on Christmas Eve, to the borders of Great Slave Lake, of which he gives a fairly accurate description. He was the first white man to see this great inland sea, which Alexander Mackenzie was to cross eighteen years later on his famous journey to the Arctic. The remainder of the journey was comparatively uneventful, Hearne and his men reaching Fort Prince

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of Wales the last of June, 1772, after an absence of eighteen months and twenty-three days. For two years, seven months, and twenty-four days, he had been almost continuously engaged in the attempt to reach the Coppermine—a remarkable enough example of dogged perseverance under exceptional difficulties.

In 1774, two years after his return from the Coppermine, Hearne was again sent inland, upon a more prosaic, though scarcely less significant journey. For a century, the Hudson's Bay Company had been content to enjoy their comfortable monopoly on the shores of the great bay. The Indians had always been content to bring their peltries down to Fort Prince of Wales and York Factory, and no valid reason appeared why the Company should go to the expense and discomfort of following them to their far-off homes in the interior of the continent. The time came, however, when rival fur-traders forced their hand. A group of energetic merchants

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in Montreal had sent men among the Indians west of Lake Superior, shortly after the cession of Canada to England, and these tireless adventurers, working ever deeper into the north-west, had at last reached the Churchill, at Frog Portage, where they intercepted the Indians on their way down to the bay, and persuaded them to transfer their trade to themselves. Aroused at length to the seriousness of their position, the Hudson's Bay Company determined to fight the Montreal traders—afterward known as the North-West Company—on their own ground. For such a task they could find no better man than Samuel Hearne, who was accordingly entrusted with the task of building a trading post on the Saskatchewan, in the very heart of the continent. This post, Cumberland House, built in 1774, is still operated by the Company.

The following year Hearne returned to the bay, to become governor of Fort Prince of Wales, where he remained until the year

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1782, when the fort was captured by Admiral La Pérouse. Some years ago Dr. Robert Bell met an aged pensioner of the Company on the bay, who had been present when La Pérouse appeared with his French fleet. "When the French appeared outside the walls," said he, "there were not sufficient men inside to have manned one gun. The majority were all away in the marshes duck-shooting." He described graphically how La Pérouse appeared before the gate demanding the surrender of the fort; how Hearne, realizing the uselessness of resistance, hastily doffed the rough working clothes in which he had been working about the fort, and put on the full uniform of his office as governor; how he marched out through the gate, his sword drumming against the stones as he went, and presented the keys of the fort to La Pérouse on a silver salver; and how the latter, having stripped the fort of everything of value, tried to pull down the massive walls, failing which he blew them up with gun-

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powder, leaving them pretty much as they appear to-day.

La Pérouse sailed away to France, taking Hearne with him as his prisoner. The two struck up a friendship, however, on the voyage, and the explorer was treated rather as a literary notability than as a prisoner of war. La Pérouse had found Hearne's narrative of his journey to the Coppermine among the papers at the fort, and after reading it with keen interest, returned it to the author on the express stipulation that it should be published as soon as possible after his return to England. For one reason or another, possibly through the reluctance of the Hudson's Bay Company to make his discoveries public, Hearne was unable to redeem his promise for several years. It was not, in fact, until 1795, three years after the explorer's death, that the book finally saw the light.

III

THE DISCOVERY OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

THE ancient town of Three Rivers, on the St. Lawrence, can boast of having given birth to several notable explorers, but of none of its famous sons has it more reason to feel proud than of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de la Vérendrye. Born in 1685, son of René Gaultier de Varennes, governor of the town, La Vérendrye was marked out by inheritance and environment as a man of action. Entering the Army at the age of fourteen, he had seen active service in the New England and Newfoundland campaigns before he reached the age of twenty. In 1706, he sailed for France, fought under his brother in Flanders, and

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was severely wounded at Malplaquet. Urged by keen ambition and untiring energy, and seeing little promise of advancement in the Army, he returned to Canada. An unusual period of peace reigned in the new land, and the thoughts of the young man turned toward the vast untravelled spaces of the West, wonderful tales of which he had eagerly listened to as a boy in Three Rivers. Half forgotten dreams of discovery took form anew in his mind, and when the Governor offered him the position of commandant of the trading posts on Lake Nipigon, north of Superior, he accepted with alacrity.

Here we find him in 1728, faithfully discharging the duties of his office, but never losing sight of the supreme object of his ambition. The compelling call of the West was ever in his ear, and he was even now upon the threshold of his life's work. In this year there came to him from Kaministiquia an Indian named Ochagach, who told him of a great lake many leagues to the west-

ward of Lake Superior, out of which flowed a mighty river toward the setting sun. Ochagach had not himself been to the mouth of this river, but had learned from the neighbouring tribes that it emptied into an immense body of water that ebbed and flowed. Who can wonder that La Vérendrye saw in this a clear path to the long-sought Western Sea, the goal toward which the eyes of French explorers had been steadily turned since the days of Jacques Cartier! Ochagach's first lake was the Lake of the Woods; his river, the Winnipeg; and his great western sea, whose waters ebbed and flowed, Lake Winnipeg. The curious phenomenon of an apparently regular rise and fall of the waters of this lake has been commented upon by many later travellers. It is merely the result of a change from northerly to southerly winds, but one can readily understand its effect upon the receptive minds of early explorers.

La Vérendrye returned to Quebec, en-

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listed the interest of the Governor, De Beauharnois, in his project for western discovery, and persuaded several of the leading merchants of Montreal to join him in financing the enterprise. In the summer of 1731 he set forth, accompanied by his three sons, Jean-Baptiste, Pierre and François, his nephew La Jemeraye, who had already seen service in the west among the Sioux, and a party of soldiers and *voyageurs*, about fifty in all. Father Messenger, a Jesuit missionary, joined the expedition at Michilimackinac. The Indian Ochagach was to act as guide.

August 26 they reached Grand Portage, fifteen leagues south-west of Kaministiquia, and here the explorer encountered the first of a long series of setbacks that were to try his mettle to the utmost. Enemies at Montreal had tampered with his men, playing upon their superstitious fears, and they now flatly refused to go farther. After much difficulty, a few of them were persuaded to go on to Rainy Lake to build a fort there,

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while La Vérendrye with the remainder wintered at Kaministiquia. The following year La Vérendrye joined the advance party at Rainy Lake, and the whole expedition pushed on to the Lake of the Woods, where he built Fort St. Charles. This fort consisted, according to a contemporary narrative, of several rough log cabins, enclosed in an oblong stockade. The site was discovered a year or two ago by a party of historical students from St. Boniface, and many interesting relics were recovered from the ruins.

The following winter La Vérendrye sent his eldest son down Winnipeg River to its mouth, where he built Fort Maurepas, and, first of white men, stood on the shores of Lake Winnipeg. The theory that this was the Western Sea had already been exploded, but La Vérendrye had every reason to feel satisfied with his progress in western exploration. He had reached a pivotal point in the vast system of inland waterways, leading in one direction up the Red River and the

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Assiniboine, and in another to the Saskatchewan and the rivers of the far North-west. His situation was, however, critical enough. His own slender resources were already exhausted, and the Montreal merchants were clamouring for dividends. They cared nothing for La Vérendrye's dreams of western discovery; their sole interest was in the profits of the fur-trade. Every step forward had therefore to be won against manifold obstacles. On the one hand were the natural difficulties of an unknown and difficult country; on the other the apathy and sometimes active hostility of his followers; and behind it all the necessity of delaying each forward movement until sufficient peltries had been traded from the Indians to satisfy the hungry partners in Montreal. One can readily imagine how maddening this state of affairs must have become to a man of La Vérendrye's temperament. The open road lay before him, with the promise of momentous discoveries lying ever beyond the horizon, but

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he must keep a constant curb on his impatience, and waste valuable months in bartering trinkets for furs—to enrich his greedy creditors. Time and again he was compelled to make the long journey down to Montreal, to wring much-needed supplies from the reluctant hands of his partners. Fruitless efforts were made to induce the government to grant financial assistance to what was really a great national undertaking; and La Vérendrye finally abandoned himself to the inevitable. He must move forward with clogged feet; but he was determined to continue his task at all hazards. To put the final test to his courage, his right-hand man, La Jemeraye, died after a brief illness brought on by overwork and exposure, and a few months later his eldest son, Jean-Baptiste, was treacherously murdered by the Sioux.

With tireless energy and resourcefulness, however, La Vérendrye moved forward, his eyes ever fixed on the great object of his ambition—the discovery of the Western

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Sea. Ascending Red River to the forks, he built a temporary post in what is now the city of Winnipeg; and paddling up the Assiniboine, built Fort La Reine not far from the present town of Portage la Prairie. In the autumn of 1738, he set out on an overland journey to the Mandan villages on the Missouri, and his narrative furnishes the earliest account of this most remarkable of the western tribes. A number of the Mandans came out to meet him, bearing corn in the ear and native tobacco, emblems of peace and friendship. An imposing entry was made into the Mandan village. The French flag was borne proudly in front, and a salute fired with all the available muskets, to the consternation of the Indians, who were as yet unaccustomed to the noisy firearms of the Whites. The chief's lodge was placed at the disposal of the explorer, and he and his men were generously entertained. Here, again, however, ill luck dogged the steps of La Vérendrye. He awoke the next

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morning, to find that his interpreter, on whom he had relied to question the Mandans as to the most practicable route to the westward, had disappeared in the night. The principal object of his journey was defeated, and nothing remained but to retrace his steps to Fort La Reine, leaving behind a couple of men to winter among the Mandans and learn their language. Before taking his departure, he assembled the chiefs and principal warriors of the Mandans, and presented them with a French flag and a leaden plate, duly engraved, to be kept in perpetuity as a record of the taking possession of the Missouri country in the name of the French King.

In the autumn of 1739 the two men left with the Mandans returned, bringing good news. During the summer a party of strange Indians had arrived at the Mandan villages from the far South-west. They told the French of bearded white men who lived in houses, and prayed to the Master of Life. The home of these white men was said to be

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by the borders of the great lake whose waters were unfit to drink, and they offered to conduct them to the sea, which they said could be reached in a few months.

The opportunity was too good to be lost. La Vérendrye had not yet recovered from a serious illness contracted on his visit to the Mandans, but it was decided that his son Pierre should lead an expedition toward the south-west—an expedition which the explorers confidently expected would solve at last the great problem of the Western Sea.

Pierre set forth in the spring of 1742, accompanied by his younger brother. They were to travel across the plains to the Mandan villages, where they hoped to pick up Cheyenne guides. The spectacle of these two young men, with nothing to rely upon but their own alert intelligence, pluck, and resourcefulness, starting out upon a journey of several thousand miles, through a country infested with hostile tribes, is one to arouse enthusiasm. That they did

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not indeed realize the full extent of the task they had assumed is true enough, but the information they had gained could have left no doubt that it was one to test their courage and endurance to the utmost, and there were chances enough that they might never return to Fort La Reine. It must therefore have been a solemn moment, both for them and their father, when the time came to say farewell.

They reached the Mandan villages without mishap, but there disappointment awaited them. The Gens des Chevaux, or Cheyennes, had not arrived, and though they waited impatiently through the months of May, June and July, there was still no sign of the promised guides. To wait any longer would be impossible. They must go forward, or abandon the attempt for that year. Two of the Mandans were at last prevailed upon to act as guides to the Cheyenne country, and the two young Canadians struck out boldly into the unknown. For twenty

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days they journeyed toward the south-west, over rolling prairie and through the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri, and about the middle of September arrived at a village of the Beaux Hommes, or Crows, where they were hospitably received. One of the Mandans had already deserted them, and the other now insisted on returning to his own people. Here they remained for some time, gathering information as to the country beyond. Early in November they reached a village of the Cheyennes, and, still traveling toward the south-west, came to a tribe known as the Petits Renards, and, beyond these, another called the Pioya. Turning now somewhat more to the south, they encountered a party of Cheyennes, returning in a panic to their villages, having been attacked and defeated by a number of Shoshones. The Shoshones bore somewhat the same relation to the surrounding tribes as the Sioux did farther north, and the Iroquois east of the Mississippi. Their hand was

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against every man, and their war-parties carried desolation into every quarter of the south-west. From the Cheyennes, Pierre and his brother learned of a tribe known as the Gens de l'Arc, or Bowmen, who were reported as trading with the Spanish settlements on the Gulf of California. This was news indeed to the explorers, as it seemed to bring them within measurable distance of their goal. They pushed on, therefore, with redoubled vigour, and on November 21 came to one of the Bow villages.

Here everything was excitement and confusion. A party of Shoshones had been discovered to the westward, and the Bowmen were organizing an expedition against them. At the urgent invitation of their hosts, La Vérendrye and his brother consented to accompany them. They must have done so with some reluctance, knowing from experience the importance of keeping on good terms with all the tribes through whose country they must journey, but they

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had little choice in the matter. The attitude of the Bowmen toward the Shoshones was not one to admit of any neutral attitude. The explorers must take sides with their hosts, or return the way they had come. There was at least this consolation, that the course proposed to be taken by the warriors would bring them within reach of the great range of mountains to the westward, of which they had already heard from the Cheyennes, and which they now knew formed an immense barrier across their path.

On the first day of the new year, 1743, the brothers saw upon the horizon a jagged outline. Day by day the mountains grew more distinct. They looked with amazement upon their towering peaks, and perhaps remembered the tales they had listened to years before, in their far-off Canadian home, of the mysterious Mountains of Bright Stones that lay far to the westward, upon the borders of the Western Sea. As they drew nearer, the slopes of the mountains were seen

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to be thickly clothed with pine and fir. Finally, on the tenth of the month they had reached their very foot, but as ill luck would have it the war party here came unexpectedly upon a camp of the Shoshones, deserted and in the utmost confusion. It was clear that the Shoshones, learning through their scouts of the approach of this formidable war party, had precipitately fled; but the Bowmen, with native perversity, jumped to the conclusion that the enemy had executed a flank movement, with the purpose of falling upon their defenceless camp, where were all their women and children. Turning back therefore, despite the remonstrances of some of their chiefs, backed by the explorers, they never paused until the camp was reached, where they found to their chagrin that everything was in perfect security, and that the squaws had seen nothing of the Shoshones.

One can readily conceive the bitter disappointment of Pierre and his brother.

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With the prize, as they conceived, almost within their grasp, they were forced to turn back. There were the mountains, upon whose western slope lay the road to the Western Sea. Indeed, for aught they knew to the contrary, that long-sought sea might even be visible from the summits of these guardian peaks. But the eastern slopes were infested with war parties of Shoshones, and none of the Bowmen would think of acting as guide on such a perilous journey. Desperately they sought some means of going forward, but every expedient failed. Nothing remained but to turn back, and hope for some more favourable opportunity another year.

The long journey to the Assiniboine was made without mishap. On the banks of the Missouri they erected a pyramid of stones on the summit of a hill overlooking the river, buried a leaden plate bearing the arms of France, and formally took possession of the country in the name of the King. They

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reached Fort La Reine July 2, 1743, to the great joy of their father, who had become anxious on account of their prolonged absence, and had almost given them up as dead. Their expedition, so far as its principal object was concerned, had been a failure, but it had resulted in the discovery of a great range of mountains, and that in itself was no mean achievement. The exact course followed by Pierre and his brother has been matter of dispute, as has also the particular range which they discovered, but whether they reached the Rocky Mountains proper, or only some outlying range such as the Bighorn, the journey from the Assiniboine, under all the circumstances, deserves to rank among the most remarkable expeditions in the annals of western exploration.

Of the later explorations of La Vérendrye and his sons little can be said here. They reached the banks of the Saskatchewan, and built one or more posts on its banks, but whatever dreams the indomitable explorer

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may have entertained of reaching the Western Sea by this northern route were brought to nought by the vindictive schemes of his enemies in the east. Beauharnois, who had been his constant friend, had been recalled to France, and the new governor, Galissonière, and his successor La Jonquière, placed every obstacle in his path. Belated recognition came from the King, in the shape of the coveted Cross of St. Louis, but the life of La Vérendrye was already drawing to its close. He had returned to Quebec, broken in health, but not in spirit. One of his last public acts, in September, 1749, was to write a characteristic letter to the Colonial Minister in Paris outlining a new plan for the discovery of the Western Sea. Three months later the great pathfinder of the west had finally laid down his task. Unfinished it may have been, but was it not a splendid example of pluck and perseverance under conditions of almost unexampled difficulty and discouragement?

IV

OVERLAND TO THE PACIFIC

LIKE most of the leaders in the western fur trade, Alexander Mackenzie was a native of Scotland, born at Stornoway, in the Island of Lewis, in the year 1763. He came to Canada at the age of sixteen, and almost immediately determined to engage in the fur trade. At Montreal the young man came into contact with such pioneer merchants as Simon McTavish and the Frobishers, Alexander Norman McLeod, John Gregory, and Peter Pond, who were already laying the foundations of the North-West Company and its vigorous rival the X Y Company. On every side he heard tales of the western traffic in peltries ; tales

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that fired his imagination and appealed to the spirit of adventure that was strong within him. It was necessary that he should serve an apprenticeship in the counting-houses at Montreal, and there as well as at Detroit, he gained a knowledge of the practical details of his work, but Mackenzie was never more than nominally a fur-trader. The commercial side of his chosen occupation did not appeal to him. His heart was set upon achieving some notable exploit in the field of exploration, and while conscientiously performing the duties of his position as a trader, he never lost sight of this first object of his ambition. The constant need of opening up new fields and getting in touch with remote tribes of Indians took him into many unknown or little known regions, but Mackenzie looked beyond these minor explorations to some notable discovery that would mean a distinct addition to the sum of geographical knowledge.

His first great opportunity came in 1789,

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when he set forth, with a small company of *voyageurs*, to trace the mighty river that afterward bore his name, to its remote destination in the Arctic sea. The story of that remarkable piece of exploration cannot be given here. It must be sufficient to say that, after surmounting many difficulties and discouragements, he finally reached the mouth of the river, and returned to his starting-point, Fort Chipewyan, on Lake Athabaska, after an absence of one hundred and two days.

This successful piece of work served but to stimulate Mackenzie's ambition to one of even greater magnitude and more far-reaching significance. This was nothing less than the completion of the long search for the Western Sea, a search which, as has been stated in a previous article, had been the dream of French explorers throughout the entire period of French rule in Canada, and which had been left as a legacy to the men of British birth who succeeded them. The

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tide of discovery had in Mackenzie's day been carried to the foot of the Rocky Mountains, but beyond all was unknown. Cook, Vancouver, and other adventurous navigators had explored the Pacific coast of the continent, and it remained for some equally enterprising land-captain to close the gap by an expedition over the mountains and through the untravelled region beyond, to the shores of the Western Sea. This was the task that Mackenzie had set himself, and upon which he engaged in the autumn of 1792.

Starting once more from Chipewyan, with a fellow-countryman, Alexander Mackay, six French-Canadian *voyageurs*, and a couple of Indians, he ascended Peace River to a point six miles above the mouth of Smoky River and wintered there. Here he made final preparations for the overland dash to the sea, as soon as the ice should break up the following spring, in this way saving much valuable time for the double journey,

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for he planned to make his way to the sea and return the same season.

On May 9, 1793, Mackenzie embarked with his men in a twenty-five-foot canoe, which he had built during the winter. It was made particularly strong and light, for the uncertain waterways that lay before him. His course lay up the Peace River, whose waters beyond this point had never before been traversed by white men. Elk, buffalo and other large game were plentiful, and the Indian hunters kept the party well supplied. The explorer watched with kindling enthusiasm the unfolding of the wonderful panorama that lay before him, "a succession of the most beautiful scenery I have ever beheld." The ground rose in terraces from the water's edge, the level spaces richly carpeted with young grass, while groves of poplar in every imaginable shape lent variety to the scene, which was further enlivened by vast herds of elk and buffalo, browsing on the open meadows. Here and

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there the terraces were broken by rugged precipices, rising sheer to a height of several hundred feet.

Eight days after his departure from the winter quarters, Mackenzie had his first view of the mountains, their towering snow-crowned summits glittering along the western horizon. It was now becoming increasingly difficult to make headway against the violence of the current. The canoe was laboriously dragged up several rapids by means of a sixty-fathom line. At one place steps had to be cut in the face of the solid rock for a distance of twenty feet, to get round a projecting shoulder. Finally further progress by water became impossible, and the explorer and his men had no option but to cut a trail through the bush and portage canoe and lading some three miles, up and down hill, to the navigable water above the rapids. A few hundred yards below this point the river rushed with astonishing velocity between

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towering banks, not more than thirty-five yards apart. W. F. Butler, who travelled this way some eighty years afterward, has left a striking picture of this gorge :

“ Making my way along the edge of what was, in ages past, the shore of a vast lake, I gained the summit of a ridge which hung directly over the cañon. Through a mass of wrack and tangled forest I held on, guided by the dull roar of waters until I reached an open space, where a ledge of rock dipped suddenly into the abyss ; on the outer edge of this rock a few spruce trees sprung from cleft and fissure, and from beneath, deep down in the dark chasm, a roar of waters floated up into the day above. Advancing cautiously to the smooth edge of the chasm, I took hold of a spruce-tree and looked over. Below lay one of those grim glimpses which the earth holds hidden, save from the eagle and the mid-day sun. Caught in a dark prison of stupendous cliffs (cliffs which hollowed out beneath, so that the topmost

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ledge literally hung over the boiling abyss of waters), the river foamed and lashed against rock and precipice, nine hundred feet below me. Like some caged beast that finds escape impossible on one side, it flew as madly and as vainly against the other; and then fell back in foam and roar and raging whirlpool. The rocks at the base held the record of its wrath in great trunks of trees, and blocks of ice lying piled and smashed in shapeless ruin."

On the last day of the month, they reached the forks of the Peace River, and Mackenzie was sorely puzzled whether to ascend what was afterward known as the Finlay, to the north, or the Parsnip, to the south. He remembered, however, the warning of an Indian who had been this far, and had assured him that the southern branch led by a portage to another river flowing to the south-west. "I did not entertain the least doubt," says he, "if I could get into the other river, that I should reach the ocean."

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Amid bitter grumbling from his men, who did not at all relish forcing the canoe up what was much the more difficult of the two streams, Mackenzie turned to the south. Day after day they made their painful way against the current, until at length they reached the upper waters of the Parsnip, and Mackenzie began to look about anxiously for the portage.

On June 9 two natives appeared on the banks, and after much parleying with the interpreter, met Mackenzie on the shore. They approached him with a good deal of suspicion, but were finally persuaded to lay aside their bows and arrows, and when the explorer stepped forward and took each of them by the hand, one of them, but with a very tremulous action, drew his knife from his sleeve and presented it to him as a mark of submission. Mackenzie was the first white man they had ever met, and they examined him and all his belongings with open-mouthed astonishment. With one of

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these Indians as guide, the party continued up the river, and on June 12 reached a small lake, the source of the Parsnip. If Mackenzie had gone no farther, this in itself would have been a notable enough achievement, for he now stood at one of the most remote sources of the same mighty river system whose outlet he had discovered a little over four years before. Two thousand four hundred and twenty miles lay between source and mouth.

Mackenzie, however, was looking toward a more notable achievement than the discovery of the source of the Parsnip, and the most difficult part of his journey still lay before him. Shouldering canoe and baggage, he and his men crossed the height of land, and after a troublesome passage down a tumultuous little stream to which he gave the appropriate name of Bad River, reached the banks of what was afterward to be known as the Fraser, but which he supposed to be the Columbia. On the banks of the Fraser

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lived an interesting tribe named the Carriers, who, like the Mandans on the Missouri, had attained a comparatively high state of development. Mackenzie describes one of their houses which he visited. It was about thirty feet long by twenty wide, built to accommodate several families, with three fire-places, rows of beds on either side, and shelves for storing dried fish. He also gives the earliest description of the salmon-trap of the Carriers, a long cylindrical basket made of thin strips of wood held together by half a dozen hoops.

From the Carriers the explorer learned that the passage down the Fraser would be attended with grave danger, and that he would find a more direct and easier route overland. He determined, therefore, to abandon his canoe and make a dash for the sea. To reach the route indicated by the Carriers, it was necessary that he should return up the river a considerable distance. Before turning back, Mackay engraved the

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name of his leader, with the date, on a tree by the river's side. At this point the North-West Company some years later built a trading post, and named it Alexandria, in honour of the explorer.

On July 3, Mackenzie arrived at the mouth of the West Road River, or the Blackwater as it is now called, from which he set out the following day on the last stage of his journey to the sea. Near the mouth of the river he cached a quantity of provisions and some of the heavier equipment, and the remainder was made up into ninety-pound packs for the *voyageurs*, the Indians carrying loads of half that weight. So laden, the party marched off to the westward, their burdens growing lighter from day to day as they neared the coast. They passed through native villages from time to time, and although their appearance excited astonishment, the inhabitants always proved friendly.

On the seventeenth of the month they

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crossed a range of mountains, and late at night came to a village of the Coast Indians, on the banks of the Bella Coola, whither the Indian guides had already preceded them. Mackenzie walked boldly into one of the huts, threw down his burden, and, after shaking hands with some of the people, sat down upon it. They received him without the least appearance of surprise, but made signs that he should go up to the chief's house, a large building, erected on upright posts, some distance from the ground. A broad piece of timber, with steps cut in it, led to a scaffolding even with the floor.

"By this curious ladder," said Mackenzie, "I entered the house, and having passed three fires, I was received by several people, sitting upon a very wide board, at the upper end. I shook hands with them, and seated myself beside a man, the dignity of whose countenance induced me to give him that preference. I soon discovered one of my guides seated a little above me, with a neat

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mat spread before him, which I supposed to be the place of honour and appropriated to strangers."

The chief immediately rose and brought a quantity of roasted salmon, and directed a mat to be placed before the explorer on which he laid one of the salmon. Having enjoyed this hospitality, Mackenzie ordered his men to make a fire outside, and took rest of his host. "We laid ourselves down to rest," he says, "with no other canopy than the sky; but I never enjoyed a more sound or refreshing rest, though I had a board for my bed and a billet for my pillow." He had no sooner awakened the following morning, than his hospitable friend brought him a breakfast of berries and roasted salmon, with the dried roes of fish.

Salmon formed the staple food of these Indians, and they had contrived to secure to themselves an abundant supply. With great labour they had built an embankment or weir across the river. It was about four

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feet above the level of the water at the time Mackenzie saw it, and was constructed of small trees fixed in the bed of the river in a slanting position, with the heavy ends down. Over these had been laid a bed of gravel; then a tier of smaller trees; and so on alternately until the work was brought to the desired height. Beneath this weir the machines were placed, into which the salmon fell when they attempted to leap over.

"These people," says Mackenzie, "indulge an extreme superstition respecting their fish, as it is apparently their only animal food. Flesh they never taste, and one of their dogs having picked and swallowed part of a bone which we had left, was beaten by his master till he disgorged it. One of my people having also thrown a bone of the deer into the river, a native, who had observed the circumstance, immediately dived and brought it up, and, having consigned it to the fire, instantly proceeded to wash his polluted hands." This curious

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superstition even went to the length of preventing Mackenzie from taking venison in his canoe, the natives fearing that the fish would instantly smell the objectionable food, and abandon the neighbourhood.

Taking leave of these hospitable villagers, the explorer embarked with his men, and proceeded rapidly down the Bella Coola, some of the natives acting as boatmen. "I had imagined," says Mackenzie, "that the Canadians who accompanied me were the most expert canoe-men in the world, but they are very inferior to these people, as they themselves acknowledged." One of their feats was to shoot the canoe over a weir without taking a drop of water. Making brief visits to other villages, where he enjoyed the same generous hospitality, toward evening he came within sight of the mouth of the river, where it discharges into North Bentinck Arm. He spent the night at a village a short distance above the mouth of the Bella Coola, and on the morning of

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the twentieth found himself on salt water, a welcome sight to the explorer and his men.

Paddling down the North Arm, Mackenzie crossed the entrance to South Bentinck Arm, and landed at the cape which Vancouver had visited some time before and named Point Menzies. Here, for the first time, he experienced hostility on the part of the Coast Indians. Three canoes arrived, with a number of natives, whose attitude was so insolent that the *voyageurs* became alarmed and urged Mackenzie to return at once. He would not do so, however, until he had determined his position, which continuous cloudy weather had so far prevented. At last he succeeded in getting observations both for latitude and longitude, and knew that he was at the entrance of Vancouver's Cascade Canal. His object being accomplished, he immediately made preparations to return, his departure being hastened by the menacing attitude of the natives, who were gathering in large numbers. Before enter-

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ing his canoe, however, the explorer mixed some vermilion in melted grease and painted in large characters on the face of the rock on which he had slept the previous night, this brief memorial: "Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three."

The return journey was made without serious misadventure. At the mouth of the Bella Coola a number of the Indians met him with daggers in their hands and fury in their faces, but his resolute attitude and their familiarity with the deadly power of fire-arms held them in check. With characteristic daring, Mackenzie was not content to escape quietly up the river. He drew his men up in front of the village, and insisted on the restoration of a number of articles that had been pilfered, demanding at the same time a supply of fish as the price of his departure. The Indians, now thoroughly cowed, immediately complied

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with his demands. Paying for the fish the explorer continued his journey; rested at the Friendly Village for a few hours; crossed the mountains; and on August 4 had regained the Fraser. August 24 saw him back once more at his fort on Peace River. "Here," concludes Mackenzie, "my voyages of discovery terminate. Their toils and their dangers, their solitudes and sufferings, have not been exaggerated in my description. On the contrary, in many instances, language has failed me in the attempt to describe them. I received, however, the reward of my labours, for they were crowned with success."

V

SIMON FRASER, OF NEW CALEDONIA

TWELVE years after Alexander Mackenzie made his splendid journey over the mountains and through the wilderness of New Caledonia to the sea, another young fur-trader followed his trail for a time, and then by a brilliant piece of exploration opened up a new path to the shores of the Western Ocean. Scottish by descent, and Colonial by birth, Simon Fraser combined the dogged perseverance of the one with the resourcefulness of the other. He was born at Bennington, Vermont, about the year 1776, the son of a captain in Burgoyne's ill-fated army. After Captain Fraser's death, his widow, with her young son, settled

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at Three Rivers, on the St. Lawrence, removing later to St. Andrews, near Cornwall. Simon entered the service of the North-West Company in 1792, and revealed such conspicuous ability that at an age when many young men are not much more than started on their life's work, he had reached the summit of the fur-trader's ambition, ranking as a *bourgeois* or partner of the Company.

Not much is known of his life in the west up to the year 1805, beyond the fact that he was stationed at various trading posts between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains, and satisfied to some extent his restless ambition by constant expeditions into the territory of all the surrounding tribes. He crossed the mountains by the Peace River Pass in 1805, and thereafter his life becomes part of the early history of New Caledonia, that wonderful region of mountains, lakes and rivers, with its intensely interesting native population, into whose

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lives Father Morice has given us such vivid glimpses.

To Father Morice we are indebted for an entertaining account of Fraser's first meeting with the Carriers on the shores of Stuart Lake :

"The soap-berries were ripening, and most of ' Kwah's people were camped at the mouth of Beaver Creek, to the south-west of the present Fort St. James, when what appeared to them to be two immense canoes were descried struggling against the wind, around a point which separated them from the outlet of the lake.

"Immediately great alarm arises in the crowd of natives. As such large canoes have never plied the Carrier waters, there is hardly a doubt that they must contain Toeyen's friends, the wonderful strangers from 'the country beyond the horizon' he had been told to expect back. Meanwhile, the strange craft are heading for Beaver Creek, and lo! a song the like of which has

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never been heard in this part of the world strikes the native ear. What can that mean? Might not this be a war party after all?

“‘No,’ declares Toeyen, who, donning his red piece of cloth as an apron, seizes a tiny spruce bark canoe lying on the beach and fearlessly paddles away. On, on he goes, tossed about by the great waves, until he meets the strangers, who, recognizing him by his badge, bid him come on board. His fellow-tribesmen, now seeing in the distance his own little canoe floating tenantless, take fright. ‘They have already killed him,’ they exclaim. ‘Ready, ye warriors; away with the women!’

“At this cry, which flies from mouth to mouth, the men seize their bows and arrows, and the women and children seek shelter in the woods. But the curious craft, which on coming nearer prove to be large birch-bark canoes, are now within hearing distance, and Toeyen cries out to the men on shore to

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be of good cheer and have no fear, as the strangers are animated by the most friendly disposition. The fugitives are hastily recalled, and Simon Fraser, with John Stuart and his other companions, put ashore in the presence of a crowd of wondering Carriers. . .

"On landing, Fraser's men, to impress the natives with a proper idea of their wonderful resources, fired a volley with their guns, whereupon the whole crowd of Carriers fell prostrate to the ground. To allay their fears and make friends, tobacco was offered them, which on being tasted, was found too bitter, and thrown away. Then, to show its use, the crew lighted their pipes, and, at the sight of the smoke issuing from their mouths, the people began to whisper that they must come from the land of ghosts, since they were still full of the fire wherewith they had been cremated. Pieces of soap were given to the women, who, taking them to be cakes of fat, set upon crunching them, thereby

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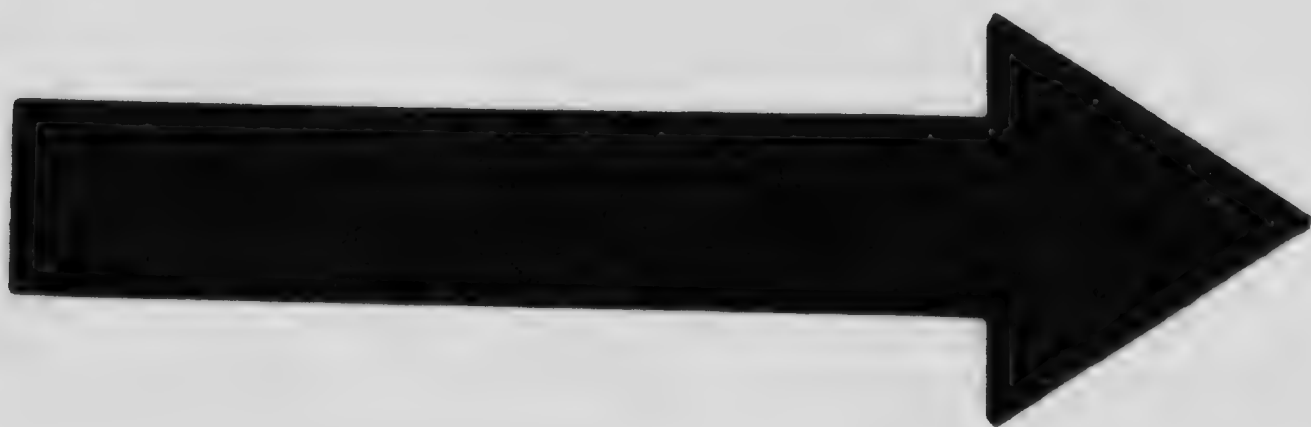
causing foam and bubbles in the mouth, which puzzled both actors and bystanders."

Near the outlet of Stuart Lake, a trading post was built, afterward known as Fort St. James, and which is still in operation. Fort Fraser was built the same year, on the lake of that name. For two years, Fraser busied himself in laying the foundations of the important fur-trade of New Caledonia; and in the spring of 1807, word came from the east that he had been selected to lead an expedition down the Tacouche Tesse (then still supposed to be the Columbia), to its mouth. The particular object of the journey was to offset the discoveries of Lewis and Clark, who had crossed overland from the Missouri, and explored the lower portion of the Columbia, reaching its mouth in November, 1805. As the great river Fraser was to explore did not happen to be the Columbia, the particular object of his journey—to take possession of its upper waters—was not accomplished; but in other respects it deserves to be re-

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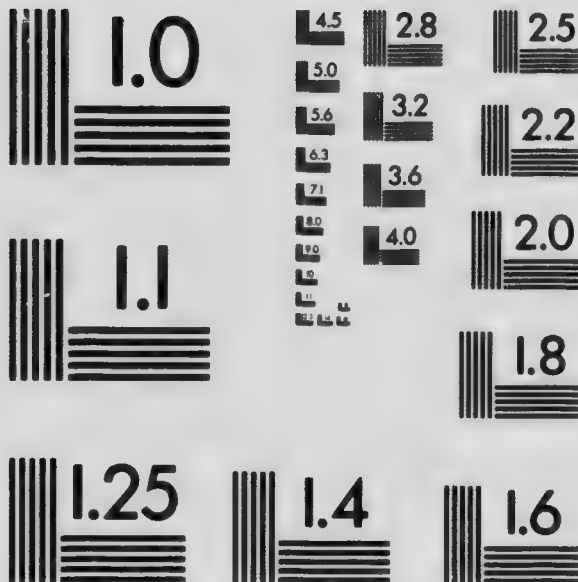
membered as one of the most extraordinary exploits in the history of exploration.

Taking with him John Stuart, Jules Maurice Quesnel, nineteen *voyageurs*, and two Indian guides, Fraser started down the river, from Fort George, on May 28. At Fort George Cañon they had a foretaste of what lay before them. Attempting to run the rapids, one of the canoes was dashed violently against the rocks, and only saved from absolute destruction by the greatest good fortune. Two days later they passed the site of future Alexandria—Mackenzie's farthest point down the river. From this point, Simon Fraser was covering absolutely new country. Beyond, all was unexplored. Who could tell what might not lie hidden in these wild fastnesses! One thing at least seemed certain: there would be no lack of excitement and danger. The natives assured Fraser that it was nothing short of madness to attempt to descend the river; that it was broken by a succession of fierce rapids



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and cataracts; and that its banks rose to immense heights on either side, in wild, impassable precipices. All this might have daunted the heart of a less stout-hearted traveller. It had no other effect upon Fraser than to stiffen his determination to carry out his orders at all possible costs. Fortunately, he had in Stuart and Quesnel two comrades after his own heart; and over the *voyageurs* he possessed the same rare influence wielded by Mackenzie; in both cases the men were dominated by a masterful personality, one that inspired both confidence and fear.

June 3 they ran some minor rapids, and came to one of formidable dimensions. The banks rose sheer from the water's edge on either side. The channel was contracted to forty or fifty yards, and through this narrow gorge the immense volume of water was forced with irresistible power, rushing turbulently, tumultuously, its foam-crested waves dashing first against one rocky wall,

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then against the other. For two long miles extended this wild tumult of waters. Could any craft made by man ride safely through? The Indians said not; and Fraser was inclined to agree with them. Yet there was no alternative but to abandon the expedition, for the banks here seemed absolutely impassable. After painful deliberation, the explorer decided that the rapids must be tried. He ordered five of his most expert boatmen to man a light canoe, and, not without serious misgivings, watched them push out into the stream.

Only for a moment could they control her. Over the first cascade she rode in safety. Then the men lost all power. Drawn into an eddy, the frail craft was whirled about like a reed, while her crew could do nothing more than keep her upright. Out into the stream again she flew, skimming over the breakers like a bird, now avoiding a jutting rock by a hair's-breadth, again in imminent danger of crashing into the

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bank. Finally, she was forced against a low, projecting rock. The men sprang out, and managed to hold what remained of the sorely-tried canoe, until Fraser came to their rescue.

To reach them, however, was a serious problem, and one involving as much peril to the rescuers as to those they hoped to rescue. The bank was almost perpendicular, and to reach the men on the rocks below, the rescuing party had to drive their daggers into the face of the cliff and let themselves down foot by foot. So they got down, but to win up again was an even more formidable task, for the canoe itself must somehow or other be dragged to the top of the precipice. Steps were cut in the face of the cliff; a line fastened to the end of the canoe; some of the men scrambled to the summit with the line, while others supported the canoe on their shoulders. After hours of painful effort, in which a single false step would have hurled the whole party into the boiling

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waters beneath, the canoe was dragged to the top of the cliff before dark. It might seem at first sight the height of folly to risk valuable lives for the sake of a canoe; but it must be borne in mind that to travellers in the wilderness the possession of a canoe may often involve the safety of the entire party.

Now the explorer was in a serious dilemma indeed. Obviously, where a light canoe could not ride in safety, it was folly to attempt to take loaded canoes. Was there a remote possibility of getting over by land? Fraser made a careful examination of the country, and decided that it might be done, though with infinite difficulty. It was, indeed, a superhuman task—climbing the steep face of a mountain with eighty or ninety-pound packs; but the tough, wiry *voyageurs*, inured to every hardship, and past-masters of the portage, achieved the seemingly impossible. Even the canoes were eventually brought safely over the mountains; and

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the whole party embarked once more on the waters of the Fraser.

If they imagined, however, that their difficulties were over, they were far enough from the truth. An hour or two of comparatively smooth-going brought them once more into the perilous neighbourhood of another great rapid, which was found to be a succession of immense whirlpools. Here, again, the choice was between running the rapids or abandoning the canoes. The latter were unloaded, therefore, and after a most hazardous passage got safely through. Fraser, usually reticent as to the dangers of his famous journey, refers to this as "a desperate undertaking."

In portaging the heavy packs overland, one of the men wandered off the trail, and came to a point where he could move neither forward nor backward. On one side rose a perpendicular wall of rock; on the other was a sheer drop to the river far beneath. If he could get rid of his unwieldy pack, it

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would be possible to make his way back slowly to safer ground ; but every effort to do so threatened to take both man and pack over the cliff. Fraser saw his predicament, and crawled on hands and knees over the rocks, until he reached a spot from which he could manage to cut the thongs that held the pack and send it spinning down into the turbulent rapids.

So the story goes day after day ; a tale of almost incredible hardship and danger ; running unknown rapids, where nothing but the marvellous instinct of the *voyageur*, or simple good fortune, saved the party from destruction ; toiling painfully over long portages, with heavy packs, up and down steep hills and around dizzy precipices, feet bruised and swollen from contact with sharp rocks and sharper thorns. A good deal has been written in disparagement of the French-Canadian *voyageur*, and some points of the indictment are no doubt founded on fact ; but after all, a man who could sing under

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such conditions as these might be forgiven many grave faults.

One can picture the scene in camp, from what we know of the *voyageur* under similar conditions elsewhere. The camp-fire has been built on some comparatively level spot, and around it lie the men, nursing bruised and bleeding feet, and thoroughly tired, but forgetful of all the perils of the day's work as they puff at their pipes and spin yarns, breaking out every little while into one or other of the inimitable *chansons* of their home-land, perhaps *À la claire fontaine*, or *Malbrouck*, or *En roulant ma boule*:

"Derrière' chez nous, y a-t-un étang,
En roulant ma boule.
Trois beaux canards s'en vont baignant,
En roulant ma boule.
Rouli, roulant, ma boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule."

Day followed day, and still the river showed no signs of a less tempestuous passage. If anything, its wild medley of cascade and

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waterfall, rock and whirlpool became more violent and forbidding. The morning of the 9th they encountered a rapid that threw all its predecessors into the shade.

"Here," says Fraser, "the channel contracts to about forty yards, and is enclosed by two precipices of immense height which, bending towards each other, make it narrower above than below. The water which rolls down this extraordinary passage in tumultuous waves and with great velocity had a frightful appearance. However, it being absolutely impossible to carry the canoes by land, all hands without hesitation embarked as it were *à corps perdu* upon the mercy of this awful tide. Once engaged, the die was cast. Our great difficulty consisted in keeping the canoes within the medium or *fil d'eau*, that is, clear of the precipice on one side and from the gulfs formed by the waves on the other. Thus skimming along as fast as lightning, the crews, cool and determined, followed each other in awful

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silence, and when we arrived at the end, we stood gazing at each other in silent congratulation at our narrow escape from total destruction."

The following day, convinced at last of the impracticability of the river for canoes, Fraser abandoned them, cached all the heavier articles, made the remainder into eighty-pound packs, and set forward on foot to the sea. Five days later he reached the Forks, where what was afterward known as the Thompson joins the main stream. Here he obtained a canoe from a party of Lillooet Indians, in which some of the party embarked, the rest following by land. On the 26th, navigation again became quite impracticable, and the entire party had to proceed by land, over an exceedingly rugged and difficult country. "I have been for a long period among the Rocky mountains," says Fraser, "but have never seen anything like this country. It is so wild that I cannot find words to describe our situation at times.

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We had to pass where no human being should venture ; yet in those places there is a regular footpath impressed, or rather indented, upon the very rocks by frequent travelling. Besides this, steps which are formed like a ladder or the shrouds of a ship, by poles hanging to one another and crossed at certain distances with twigs, the whole suspended from the top to the foot of immense precipices and fastened at both extremities to stones and trees, furnished a safe and convenient passage to the natives ; but we, who had not had the advantage of their education and experience, were often in imminent danger when obliged to follow their example."

On the 28th, Fraser reached a village of the Achinrow Indians, where he and his men enjoyed the luxury of boiled salmon. Here again canoes were obtained, and the explorer embarked on the final stage of this most eventful journey. The following day they reached a point where the river divided into several channels. Proceeding down what

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seemed to be the most promising of these channels, Fraser finally came in sight of a small bay or arm of the sea. Following the right shore, he paddled up a little river to a village of the Coast Indians. The natives fled at his approach, but returned after a time, brandishing their war clubs from a safe distance. Re-embarking, the explorer continued his course to a second village, but did not think it prudent to disembark.

His provisions were now completely exhausted, and from the attitude of the natives there seemed very little prospect of renewing the supply. Very reluctantly, therefore, Fraser turned about and ran rapidly upstream with the tide, encamping near a village of friendly Indians. He confesses his disappointment in not seeing the main ocean, but, after all, this was a very minor consideration. He had achieved the extraordinary task of tracing one of the most unnavigable of rivers from its upper waters to the sea, and had established the very important fact

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that this great river was not the Columbia. More fortunate than some other great explorers, Fraser's name has been preserved from oblivion in that of the tempestuous stream of which he was the true discoverer.

VI

TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS

LACKING the dramatic qualities of the lives of other western explorers, that of David Thompson is none the less of absorbing interest. His fame does not rest upon one brilliant exploit, but rather upon the results of a lifetime, and a long lifetime at that, of patient and most effective service. "In the westward explorations of the North-West Company," says H. H. Bancroft, "no man performed more valuable service, or estimated his achievements more modestly."

He was born in the parish of St. John, Westminster, on April 30, 1770, and entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company at the age of fourteen, starting his long

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career in the west at Fort Churchill, on Hudson Bay. There he began what is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable series of journals in the whole history of exploration. For the amazing period of sixty-six years, with scarcely a break, he recorded in these journals the results of his labours as fur-trader, surveyor and indefatigable traveller. They fill forty-five volumes of manuscript, and cover a very large part of what is now the Dominion of Canada. They include the narratives of a number of original explorations of great value, and of innumerable surveys of regions where others had preceded him, but had left only imperfect records. They constitute a veritable mine of information on the topography of North-western America, as well as on the history of the western fur-trade. These journals, with his great manuscript map, made for the North-West Company in the years 1813-14, and embodying the results of his observations and surveys for nearly a quarter of a century,

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are a legacy of which Canadians may well feel proud. As a people we have been shamefully slow in recognizing our debt to such men as David Thompson. Some day, perhaps, he may find a niche in some Hall of Fame, in the company of Cabot and Cartier; Hudson and Hearne; La Salle, Marquette and La Vérendrye; Vancouver, Mackenzie and Fraser.

For thirteen years, Thompson remained in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, building up the fur trade, establishing new posts in the interior, and surveying large sections of the wonderful system of waterways—the high-road of the fur-trader—that drains the country from the Rocky Mountains to Hudson Bay. In May 1797, he left the Hudson's Bay Company and entered the service of the North-West Company. On May 23 in that year, he makes this note in his journal: "This day left the service of the Hudson's Bay Co., and (entered) that of the Company of

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Merchants from Canada. May God Almighty prosper me." He left Bedford House, on Reindeer Lake, north of the Churchill, and travelled down to Cumberland House, meeting on the way Simon Fraser and Roderick McKenzie, of the North-West Company. With them he continued down to Grand Portage, then the headquarters of the Canadian company.

Under the Treaty of 1792, the forty-ninth parallel had become the dividing line between Canada and the United States, west of the Lake of the Woods, and Thompson's first service to his new employers was to survey the boundary and ascertain the position of the company's posts with respect thereto. He was also instructed to visit the Mandan villages on the Missouri and prepare a report upon this intensely interesting tribe ; to inquire for the fossils of prehistoric animals ; and to search for any monuments which might throw light on the ancient state of the country through which

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he was to travel. All of which bears striking testimony to the breadth of view of the enterprising Scottish merchants of Montreal who controlled the destinies of the North-West Company. Thompson faithfully carried out his instructions, so far as the surveys were concerned ; and paid a notable visit to the Mandans in 1797—the earliest of which we have any record, after that of La Vérendrye in 1738. Apparently he saw nothing of the fossils of prehistoric animals by the way, or of anything in the nature of ancient monuments.

The following year, he made an important journey on foot, in midwinter, in the course of which he discovered the headwaters of the Mississippi—a quarter of a century before Beltrami's journey of 1823. His starting-point was McDonald's House, at the mouth of the Souris, and his companions there—veteran fur-traders and travellers—laughed at the idea of attempting such a journey as he contemplated, in midwinter, and

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scouted it as impossible. David Thompson, however, enjoyed the reputation of never having set out upon any expedition, and returning without having achieved his object. This journey proved no exception to the rule. He tramped down the Assiniboine on foot, taking with him a dog-team to carry his provisions; and ascended Red River to its upper waters. Toward the end of April, he reached Turtle Lake, which he states to be the source of the Mississippi. By various waterways he made his way to the St. Louis River, which he descended to Lake Superior, and then surveyed the south shore of the lake, reaching Sault Ste Marie on May 28. From there he returned to Grand Portage.

It would be impossible in this short sketch to follow Thompson in his journeys and explorations throughout the immense country between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains. In 1807, however, he began the most notable of all his undertak-

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ings—the exploration of the mighty river of the Pacific slope, the Columbia. To this important work he devoted five years of his life. It was the crowning achievement of his long service in the west. Upon its completion, he left for ever the wonderful region of immense river-systems, boundless plains, and gigantic mountain ranges, in which so much of his life had been spent, and thereafter devoted himself to government surveys in the comparatively well-known country east of Lake Superior.

In May, 1807, Thompson left Rocky Mountain House, on the north bank of the Saskatchewan a little above the mouth of the Clearwater, and on June 22 reached the summit of Howse Pass. A few miles more, and he stood on the banks of the Blaeberry, a small tributary of the Columbia. He had now exchanged the comparatively gentle and easy-going rivers of the plains for the wild and turbulent streams of the Pacific slope. All his energy and resourcefulness

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would be needed to carry his ambitious project to a successful conclusion. The Blaeberry represented the first step in a long and difficult journey to the shores of the Pacific. "May God in His mercy give me," he piously notes in his journal, "to see where its waters flow into the ocean, and return in safety."

Two days later he descended the Blaeberry to the Columbia, which, through a natural misapprehension, he named the Kootenay. Here he camped for twelve days, building canoes, and on July 12 started upstream. Duncan McGillivray had anticipated him as far as the Blaeberry, in 1800, but David Thompson was the first white man to reach the upper waters of the Columbia. Before his task was completed, he was to endure many hardships and dangers, and to have his iron will and powers of endurance tried to the uttermost, but in the end he would have to his credit the exploration of the entire length of the Columbia,

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and its great tributary the Kootenay, and down to the point where Lewis and Clark reached the Columbia in 1805 he could claim the honour of first discovery.

About the middle of July, Thompson reached Windermere Lake, and built Fort Kootenay, where he spent the winter. In the spring of 1808 he continued his way up the Columbia to its source in Upper Columbia Lake. From the head of this lake, he could see the waters of another mighty stream flowing turbulently to the south, and immediately determined to follow it. This river, which he named after his friend McGillivray, was the Kootenay, though its identity as a branch of the Columbia was not to be discovered for some time to come.

Portaging his canoes over the flat terrace, now cut by a canal, Thompson embarked on the Kootenay, which he descended to Kootenay Lake, which he reached May 14. Returning to the Columbia, he packed his winter's furs, and carried them over the

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mountains to Rocky Mountain House. September of the following year he set out on horseback, from a point on the Kootenay below the falls ; crossed the Cabinet Range, and reached Kullyspell, or Pend d'Oreille, Lake, where he built Kullyspell House. From this time until the spring of 1810, he was almost constantly occupied in exploring the Pend d'Oreille country, Crossing to the east once more, with the winter's pack, he returned in November. The Piegans having barred his way through Howse Pass, Thompson turned north, and after suffering almost incredible hardships, penetrated the mountains by way of Athabaska Pass, which he discovered in January, 1811. He reached the Columbia some distance below the Blaeberry, and in the spring added this portion of the river to his previous surveys. In June he travelled overland to the Spokane River, which he descended to the Columbia, and ascended the latter as far as Kettle Falls, the magnificent waterfall

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of which the Canadian artist and traveller Paul Kane has left us such a glowing description.

Resting here for a few days, Thompson started down the Columbia, and on July 9 reached the mouth of Snake River—the highest point attained by Lewis and Clark. Here he took formal possession of the country. "Here," he says in his journal, "I erected a pole, with a half sheet of paper well tied about it, with these words on it—Know hereby that this country is claimed by Great Britain as part of its Territories, and that the N.-W. Company of Merchants from Canada, finding the Factory for this People inconvenient for them, do hereby intend to erect a Factory in this place for the commerce of the country around.—D. Thompson." Alexander Ross ascended the Columbia in August of the same year, and mentions the proclamation in his narrative: "Early in the morning what did we see waving triumphantly in the air at the

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confluence of the two great branches, but a British flag, hoisted in the middle of the Indian camp, planted there by Mr. Thompson as he passed, with a written paper, laying claim to the country north of the forks as British territory." The explorer continued his way down the Columbia, reaching its mouth July 15 or 16. Here had been founded a few months before the famous trading post of Astoria, immortalized in Washington Irving's delightful but somewhat inaccurate story.

Retracing his steps, Thompson reached Kettle Falls, by a roundabout route, toward the end of August. From here he wrote a letter to Daniel Williams Harmon, then stationed at Stuart's Lake, in Northern British Columbia. The letter went by what was known as the Indian post. Paul Kane, in his *Wanderings of an Artist*, describes this primitive form of mail delivery. "The gentlemen in charge of the various posts have frequently occasion to send letters, sometimes

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for a considerable distance, when it is either inconvenient or impossible for them to fit out a canoe with their own men to carry it. In such cases a letter is given to an Indian, who carries it as far as suits his convenience and safety. He then sells the letter to another, who carries it until he finds an opportunity of selling it to advantage; it is thus passed on and sold until it arrives at its destination, gradually increasing in value according to the distance, and the last possessor receiving the reward for its safe delivery. In this manner letters are frequently sent with perfect security, and with much greater rapidity than could be done otherwise." One may get some idea of the "rapidity" of this means of letter carriage by the fact that Thompson's letter reached Harmon on the sixth of the following April. It took exactly seven months and eight days going from Kettle Falls to Stuart's Lake!

From Kettle Falls, Thompson continued his survey of the Columbia, ascending through

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the Lower and Upper Arrow Lakes, to Boat Encampment, at the mouth of Canoe River, where he had spent the latter part of the winter of 1810-11. He had now surveyed every foot of the Columbia, from source to mouth, and had done it with the thoroughness that marked all his work. His labours in the west were now drawing to a close. He had devoted the best years of his life to the cause of western discovery, in the service of the two great Fur-trading Companies, and felt disposed to spend his remaining years in less strenuous employment. In a letter to Alexander Fraser, he says: "If all goes well and it pleases good Providence to take care of me, I hope to see you and a civilized world in the autumn of 1812. I am getting tired of such constant hard journeys; for the last twenty months I have spent only bare two months under the shelter of a hut; all the rest has been in my tent, and there is little likelihood the next twelve months will be much otherwise."

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This was written in December, 1810, from the Athabaska River, in the course of his exceedingly difficult and dangerous trip through the mountains by way of the Athabaska Pass.

Thompson finally left the Columbia River country in May, 1812, crossing the mountains by the Athabaska Pass, and arriving at Fort William, on Lake Superior, in August. Here he finally took leave of the west and the fur-trade, and settled at Terrebonne, where for two years he was engaged in the preparation of his great map. He died in February, 1857, at the ripe age of eighty-seven.

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